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SWEDISH SETTLERS IN GLOUCESTER COUNTY, NEW
JERSEY, PREVIOUS TO 1684.

BY JOHN CLEMENT.

It is only within the last half-century that any inquiry has been made in regard to the emigrant settlers who made their homes along the eastern side of the river Delaware, in New Jersey. They were of different nationalities,—Swedes, Finns, and Dutch,—much the larger number being Swedes. They had a common object, which was to procure furs from the Indians in exchange for articles of home manufacture, and which brought them valuable returns.

Much effort has been made to trace the title to the land they occupied, but has generally failed for want of reliable documents in the shape of deeds, wills, Bible records, and family traditions.

Many tracts of land known to have been occupied by these early comers to New Jersey show no evidence of legal title until the English arrived and exercised their rights under the Proprietors.

Indirectly, however, something may be gathered from the ancient records in the office of the Supreme Court in Trenton, New Jersey, in charge of Benjamin F. Lee, Esq., who observes a jealous care of the old documents, and who is always seeking for hidden treasures among the musty tomes in his custody. One volume there, known as the record of the proceedings of the several courts of Burlington County, commencing in 1681, throws considerable light upon this subject.

It must not be forgotten that the jurisdiction of Burlington County at that time extended from Oldman's Creek up and along the river front to the most northerly point of the colony near where is now the city of Port Jervis, including

all of West New Jersey except Salem County, for Gloucester County was not established until May 26, 1686.

The government under the Proprietors was in full force, and persons desirous of locating lands naturally began to inquire how the Swedes and their neighbors became the owners of the soil they occupied.

The attention of the court, which, at that sitting, consisted of Thomas Olive, governor; Robert Stacy, William Biddle, Elias Farr, Robert Dimsdale, Daniel Wills, Robert Turner, Thomas Gardiner, and Francis Collins, justices, was called to this subject, and their honors directed Hanse Hopman, a constable and an officer of that court, to summons all persons settled on lands from the third tenth (Great Timber Creek) to Oldman's Creek, to report the quantity of land each one occupied and by what right they claimed title to the same.

The records show that the third day of the Fourth month, 1684, was the time fixed for the appearance of these settlers, and they very generally responded.

Mons Jonson, Hanse Hopman, and Peter Jonson claimed a large tract, about one mile in front, from Oldman's Creek to a small run upward. They said they held it by permit from Governor Philip Carteret, dated June 25, 1668, but did not produce the permit, neither did they know the quantity of land, not having had it surveyed.

Claus Jonson, Hanse Woolson, and David Livezey claimed four hundred and fifty acres by permit of Governor Carteret; did not produce the paper, nor have the land surveyed.

Jannes Ealason, *alias* Illman, Lansing Coleman, Noels Matson, *alias* Lawson, by John Anderson in possession, held three hundred acres by permit from Governor Carteret.

Israel Holmes claimed six hundred acres by permit of Governor Carteret, but did not produce his deed.

Philip Carteret was appointed governor of the whole territory by Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret, with power to grant lands, and hence the title of the Swedes and Finns and Dutch to the soil occupied by them and by

permit from Governor Carteret was of a kind which the Proprietors were slow to question, and discloses a fact so long sought for by inquirers in that direction.

Peter Errickson and Wooley Derrickson had one hundred acres they purchased of Thomas Budd, but did not produce their deeds.

James Sanderland had two hundred acres conveyed to him by Samuel Jenings and Thomas Budd. Said his deed was recorded.

Hanse Hopman claimed two hundred acres bought of Richard Basnett.

Paule Curwen guessed he had one hundred acres "without any face of title."

Peter Rambo showed that he owned six hundred and fifty acres by deed from Thomas Bowman; deed recorded.

Peter Dalboe and Wooley Dalboe bought two hundred acres of Thomas Budd and Samuel Jenings; deed recorded.

Anthony Neelson had one hundred and eighty acres he purchased of Budd and Jenings.

Andrew Homan bought one hundred and fifty acres of Thomas Budd, and Hanse Peterson had fifty acres conveyed to him by the same person.

Benjamin Bramma had one hundred acres bought of Thomas Mathews.

Neale Mattson did not appear, and Neale Lawson and John Anderson had been before the court at a previous session.

This was a proper inquiry to be made by the members of the court, for they were *ex officio* commissioners to direct the disposal of lands in the province. This regulation existed until 6th day of 7th month, 1688, when the Council of Proprietors was established and relieved the court of this duty. It is to be regretted that the permits were not produced and the boundaries of each tract put on record so as to show their character, and particularly locate the place of each resident. It is known, however, that not all had land on the river front, but many settled on the several creeks that ran inland, and gradually utilized the upland for agriculture, and improved the marshes for meadow.

Their dwellings were built of logs, but made comfortable against the rigors of the cold, long winters, without any fear of starvation where the forest and streams were so prolific of food. They were a quiet, inoffensive people, and submitted to the government, be it Swedish, English, or Dutch, and were seldom involved in disputes among themselves.

There were other settlements along the river on the east-erly side, the largest of which was near and above the mouth of Penisaukin Creek, where the town of Palmyra now stands, and in that neighborhood. In some of the original locations made by the English settlers reference is made to the "Swedish land," yet every effort to trace these titles has so far failed. Tradition had it that this particular colony was the remnant of Sir Edmund Ployden's followers who erected Fort Eriwonick on the river near that place, and were left to their fate after Sir Edmund's idea of founding a great nation in the wilds of America had vanished. They were not alone, for the settlements at Wiccaco and Tinicum were of easy access by boats, and from whence intercourse was maintained with their friends at home.

The home government was careful to give them spiritual advisers, and the little church at the mouth of Raccoon Creek or that on Tinicum Island were the resorts when matrimony was contemplated, where their children were christened and their dead buried.

There was no desire on the part of the English owners to antagonize the people they found occupying the lands coming within their purchase, but rather to offer inducements for their remaining, and therefore neighborly relations were soon established between them. William Penn saw at once the benefit of having his grant occupied by settlers, and was careful that nothing should be done to make these pioneers discontented.

In one of his letters he writes as follows: "They are a plain, strong, industrious people, yet have made no great progress in the culture or propagation of fruit-trees, as if they desired rather to have enough than plenty, or for

traffic; but I presume the Indians make them the more careless, by furnishing them with the means of profit, to wit: skins and furs in exchange for rum and such strong liquors. They kindly received me as well as the English who were but few, before the people concerned with me came among them, I must needs commend their respect to authority and kind behaviour to the English."

This had reference to those on the western shore of the river, yet applied to those on the eastern shore as well.

In another noticeable case this same fact crops out and shows that the people who preceded the English settlers had just claim to the land they occupied, and made no hesitancy in producing their title.

This was an issue heard in the Upland Court in 1679, between Peter Jegou, plaintiff, and Thomas Wright and Godfrey Hancock, defendants, regarding the ownership and possession of a tract of land at Burlington, New Jersey.

Jegou produced to the court a permit and grant from Philip Carteret, governor, and proved his occupancy of the land by living there and keeping a house of entertainment for travellers. Thomas Wright and Godfrey Hancock claimed title from the Proprietors, and had planted corn, cut timber, mowed hay, and exercised other acts of ownership thereon.

The court, after hearing both parties and examining the papers, decided that the title was in Peter Jegou, to the exclusion of Thomas Wright and Godfrey Hancock, holders under the Proprietors' estate.

Gradually these facts are being developed, and it is to be hoped that in the near future some of these permits or deeds or the record of the same may come to light, and settle a long-mooted question touching this subject.